

Remarks of Ambassador Richard Olson  
at the American Business Forum Annual Dinner  
April 3, 2013  
Pearl Continental Hotel, Lahore

As delivered

Assalamu alaikum.

It's nice to see so many of our ABF members and friends here tonight. I'd like to thank the organizers for putting together such a great event. I'd also like to introduce some other members of my team who are here tonight. Our Consul General, Nina Fite, needs no introduction as she is already a good friend of many of you in this room. Also here is the U.S. Agricultural Counselor, Todd Drennan, and the Embassy Economic Counselor, Robert Ewing.

I would also like to congratulate Salim Ghauri on the impressive growth of NetSol. I saw in the media that your stock is up 256% in the past year.

I understand that recently on the radio there was an advertisement featuring a Pakistani woman talking about how much she enjoyed her job at Coca-Cola Pakistan. The radio advertisement had the woman describing Coca-Cola as an inclusive workplace and a positive working environment. And the woman in the advertisement welcomed more people to apply to work at Coca-Cola Pakistan.

I was told that a young woman working at KFC enjoys a high status because the American ethos of empowering employees stands out.

These stories reminded me of a point I keep hearing: U.S. companies are productive and progressive members of Pakistan's society and economy. U.S. companies employ an almost entirely Pakistani workforce, including almost all of their senior managers. These companies pay taxes to Pakistan, and they have wide-ranging corporate social responsibility programs that benefit communities across this country. They promote labor rights and inclusive, discrimination-free workplaces.

Your members are leaders with world-class business practices and working conditions. We welcome your ideas on how we can expand the ways we work together. Let me offer two ideas, and afterwards, I will be eager to hear your responses.

First, the U.S. Mission in Pakistan, the U.S.-Pakistan Women's Council, and the American Business Forum (ABF) are working on plans to place at least 20 Pakistani women in internship opportunities at ABF's member companies. The U.S.-Pakistan Women's Council would share best practices and provide Internet-based seminars to help develop these skilled women.

Participating ABF companies would benefit by having a direct employment pipeline for hiring talented Pakistanis. As these women gain valuable professional experience in American companies, your companies would get access to top-notch talent.

Second, let's consider advocating for economic reform together. For example, we heard from one of your members that a local competitor was not paying its taxes, thus reducing its operating costs and letting it undercut your members with lower prices. Alone, a single U.S. company raising this with the Pakistan government might not be effective in pushing forward tax reform. Together, a group of companies stands stronger.

Economic reform requires painful decisions, but it will help Pakistan overcome fiscal, energy, and agricultural challenges. Trade also has the potential to create jobs for the estimated 20 million Pakistanis entering the labor force in the next 10 years. Pakistanis can reach their full potential when they have economic opportunities – such as opportunities to make soccer balls in Punjab and then sell them across the world.

Already, Pakistan has shined overseas with success stories like the AllWorld Network's "Pakistan 100 Group" of the country's fastest growing companies. But it will take meaningful cooperation between the public and private sectors for true progress. Together, the public and private sectors can develop a strategy to show the world that Pakistan is truly open for business.

In closing, let me applaud you for being excellent corporate citizens. American companies make our country proud. And let me extend the offer to host you for a meeting in Islamabad. I always welcome the opportunity to meet with business leaders.

Thank you for your attention. Khuda hafez.